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The Autobiography of a Play

PUBLICATIONS

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Dramatic Museum

OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

First Series

Papers on Playmaking:

- I THE NEW ART OF WRITING PLAYS. By Lope de Vega. Translated by William T. Brewster. With an Introduction and Notes by Brander Matthews.
- II THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PLAY. By Bronson Howard. With an Introduction by Augustus Thomas.
- III THE LAW OF THE DRAMA. By Ferdinand Brunetière. Translated by Philip M. Hayden. With an Introduction by Henry Arthur Jones.
- IV ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON AS A DRAMATIST. By Arthur Wing Pinero. With an Introduction and Bibliographical Appendix by Clayton Hamilton.

P A P E R S O N P L A Y - M A K I N G

II

The Autobiography of a Play

BY

BRONSON HOWARD

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

AUGUSTUS THOMAS

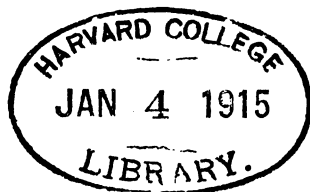


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I N T R O D U C T I O N

THE qualities that made Bronson Howard a dramatist, and then made him the first American dramatist of his day, were his human sympathy, his perception, his sense of proportion, and his construction. With his perception, his proportion, and his construction, respectively, he could have succeeded as a detective, as an artist, or as a general. It was his human sympathy, his wish and his ability to put himself in the other man's place, that made play-writing definitely attractive to him. As a soldier he would have shown the courage of the dogged defender in the trench or the calmly supervising general at headquarters, rather than the mad bravery that carried the flag at the front of a forlorn hope. His gifts were intellectual. His writing was more disciplined than inspired. If we shall claim for him genius, it must be preferably the genius of infinite pains.

He saw intimately and clearly. His proportion made him write with discretion and

a proper sense of cumulative emphasis, and his construction enabled him so to combine his materials as to secure this effect. He was intensely self-critical; and while almost without conceit concerning his own work, he had an accuracy of detached estimation that enabled him to stand by his own opinion with a proper inflexibility when his judgment convinced him that the opinion was correct.

He worked slowly. At one time, in his active period, it was his custom to go from New York, where he lived, to New Rochelle, where he had formerly lived. There, upon the rear end of a suburban lot, he had a plain board cabin not more than ten feet square. In it were a deal table, a hard chair, and a small stove. He would go to this cabin in the morning when the tide of suburban travel was setting the other way, and spend his entire day there with his manuscript and his cigars. He carried a small lunch from his home. He once told me he was satisfied with his day's work if it provided him with ten good lines that would not have to be abandoned. I did not take that statement to imply that there were not in his experience the more profitable days that are in the work of

every writer—days when the subject seems to command the pen and when the hand cannot keep pace with the vision. He was often too saturated with his story, too much the prisoner of his people, for it to have been otherwise; but his training had verified for him the truth that easy writing is hard reading.

Then, too, while Bronson Howard arranged his characters for the eye and built his story for the judgment, he wrote his speeches for the ear. This attention to the cadence of a line was so essential to him that when writing as he sometimes did for a magazine he studied the sound of his phrase as if the print were to be read aloud. This same care for the dialog would retard its production; and critical revision would enforce still further delay.

William Gillette once said to an interviewer that "plays were not written, but were rewritten." The experience of many playwrights would support that statement. In the case of Bronson Howard, the autobiography of his 'Banker's Daughter' certainly does so. His most profitable play, perhaps, and the one which also brought him the great-

est popular recognition, was 'Shenandoah.' That play was produced by a manager, who, after its first performance, believed that it would not succeed. A younger and more hopeful one saw in it its great elements of popularity, and encouraged him to rewrite it.

Mr. William H. Crane, in a recent felicitous talk to the Society of American Dramatists, said that the 'Henrietta' was played exactly as its author had delivered it to the actors, without the change or the need of change in a single word, and with only the repetition late in the play of a line that had been spoken in an early act. That fact does not exclude the possibility of rewritings before the manuscript came to the company, but rather, in view of Bronson Howard's thoroughness as a workman and his masterly sense of proportion, makes such rewritings the more probable. The effect, however, of his rewriting, wherever it may have been, and the slow additions of his daily contributions, was that of spontaneity.

Some philosopher tells us that a factor of greatness in any field is the power to generalize, the ability to discover the principle underlying apparently discordant facts. Bron-

son Howard's plays are notable for their evidence of this power. He saw causes, tendencies, results. His plays are expositions of this chemistry. 'Shenandoah' dealt broadly with the forces and feelings behind the Civil War; the 'Henrietta' with the American passion for speculation—the money-madness that was dividing families. 'Aristocracy' was a very accurate, altho satirical, seizure of the disposition, then in its strongest manifestation, of a newly-rich and Western family of native force to break into the exclusive social set of New York and to do so thru a preparatory European alliance.

He has a human story in every instance. There is always dramatic conflict between interesting characters, of course, but behind them is always the background of some considerable social tendency—some comprehensive generalization—that includes and explains them all. The commander from his eminence saw all the combatants: he knew what the fight was about, and it always was about something worth while. Bronson Howard never dramatized piffle.

He was an observer of human nature and events, a traveler, a thinker, a student of the

drama of all ages. He had been a reporter and an editorial writer. His plays were written by a watchful, sympathetic, and artistic military general turned philosopher.

AUGUSTUS THOMAS.

(June 1914).

The Autobiography of a Play

The Autobiography of a Play

As read before the Shakspeare Club
of Harvard University

I HAVE not come to Newcastle with a load of coals; and I shall not try to tell the faculty and students of Harvard University anything about the Greek drama or the classical unities. I will remind you of only one thing in that direction; and say even this merely because it has a direct bearing upon some of the practical questions connected with play-writing which I purpose to discuss. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—perhaps we should give the entire credit, as some authorities do, to Aeschylus—taught the future world the art of writing a play. But they did not create the laws of dramatic construction. Those laws exist in the passions and sympathies of the human race. They existed thousands of years before the Father of the Drama was born: waiting, like the other laws of nature, to be discovered and utilized by man.

A lecturer on "Animal Magnetism" failed to make his appearance one night, many years ago, in the public hall of a little town in Michigan, and a gentleman from Detroit consented to fill the vacant place. His lecture began and ended as follows: "Animal magnetism is a great subject, and the less said about it the better; we will proceed to experiments."

I will take that wise man as my own exemplar today, and I will begin by echoing his words: The drama in general is a great subject, and the less I say about it the better; we will proceed to experiments.

It happens that one of my own plays has had a very curious history. It has appeared before the American public in two forms, so radically different that a description of the changes made, and of the reasons for making them, will involve the consideration of some very interesting laws of dramatic construction. I shall ask you to listen very carefully to the story, or plot, of the piece as it was first produced in Chicago in 1873. Then I shall trace the changes that were made in this story before the play was produced in New York five years later. And after that,

to follow the very odd adventures of the same play still further, I shall point out briefly the changes which were made necessary by adapting it to English life with English characters, for its production at the Court Theater, London, in 1879. All the changes which I shall describe to you were forced upon me (as soon as I had decided to make the general alterations in the play) by the laws of dramatic construction; and it is to the experimental application of these laws to a particular play that I ask your attention. The learned professors of Harvard University know much more about them than I do, so far as a study of dramatic literature, from the outside, can give them that knowledge; and the great modern authorities on the subject—Hallam, Lessing, Schlegel and many others—are open to the students of Harvard in her library; or, rather, shall I say, they lie closed on its shelves. But I invite you today to step into a little dramatic workshop, instead of a scientific library; and to see an humble workman in the craft, trying, with repeated experiments—not to elucidate the laws of dramatic construction, but to obey them, exactly as an inventor (deficient, it

may be, in all scientific knowledge) tries to apply the general laws of mechanics to the immediate necessities of the machine he is working out in his mind. The moment a professor of chemistry has expressed a scientific truth, he must illustrate it at once by an experiment, or the truth will evaporate. An immense amount of scientific truth is constantly evaporating, for want of practical application; the air above every university in the world is charged with it. But what are the laws of dramatic construction? No one man knows much about them. As I have already reminded you, they bear about the same relation to human character and human sympathies as the laws of nature bear to the material universe. When all the mysteries of humanity have been solved, the laws of dramatic construction can be codified and clearly explained; not until then. But every scientific man can tell you a little about nature, and every dramatist can tell you a little about dramatic truth. A few general principles have been discovered by experiment and discussion. These few principles can be brought to your attention. But after you have learned all that has yet been learned

by others, the field of humanity will still lie before you, as the field of nature lies before the scientist, with millions of times more to be discovered, by you or by some one else, than has ever yet been known. All I purpose to-night is to show you how certain laws of dramatic construction asserted themselves from time to time as we were making the changes in this play; how they thrust themselves upon our notice; how we could not possibly ignore them. And you will see how a man comes to understand any particular law, after he has been forced to obey it, altho, perhaps, he has never heard of it or dreamed of it before.

And let me say here, to the students of Harvard—I do not presume to address words of advice to the faculty—it is to you and to others who enjoy the high privileges of liberal education that the American stage ought to look for honest and good dramatic work in the future. Let me say to you, then: Submit yourselves truly and unconditionally to the laws of dramatic truth, so far as you can discover them by honest mental exertion and observation. Do not mistake any mere defiance of these laws for original-

ity. You might as well show your originality by defying the law of gravitation. Keep in mind the historical case of Stephenson. When a member of the British Parliament asked him, concerning his newfangled invention, the railroad, whether it would not be very awkward if a cow were on the track when a train came along, he answered: "Very ark'ard, indeed—for the cow." When you find yourself standing in the way of dramatic truth, my young friends—clear the track! If you don't, the truth can stand it; you can't. Even if you feel sometimes that your genius—that's always the word in the secret vocabulary of our own minds—even if your genius seems to be hampered by these dramatic laws, resign yourself to them at once, with that simple form of Christian resignation so beautifully illustrated by the poor German woman on her deathbed. Her husband being asked, afterward, if she were resigned to her death, responded with that touching and earnest recognition of eternal law: "Mein Gott, she had to be!"

The story of the play, as first produced in Chicago, may be told as follows:

Act first—Scene, New York. A young

girl and a young man are in love, and engaged to be married. The striking originality of this idea will startle any one who has never heard of such a thing before. Lilian Westbrook and Harold Routledge have a lover's quarrel. Never mind what the cause of it. To quote a passage from the play itself: "A woman never quarrels with a man she doesn't love"—that is one of the minor laws of dramatic construction—"and she is never tired of quarreling with a man she does love." I dare not announce this as another law of female human nature; it is merely the opinion of one of my characters—a married man. Of course, there are women who do not quarrel with any one; and there are angels; but, as a rule, the women we feel at liberty to fall in love with do quarrel now and then; and they almost invariably quarrel with their husbands or lovers first, their other acquaintances must often be content with their smiles. But, when Lilian announces to Harold Routledge that their engagement is broken forever, he thinks she means to imply that she doesn't intend to marry him.

Women are often misunderstood by our more grossly practical sex; we are too apt

to judge of what they mean by what they say. The relations, if there are any, between a woman's tongue and her thoughts form the least understood section, perhaps, of dramatic law. You will get some idea of the intricacies of this subject, if one of your literary professors will draw you a diagram of what a woman doesn't mean when she uses the English language. Harold Routledge, almost broken-hearted, bids Lilian farewell, and leaves her presence. Lilian herself, proud and angry, allows him to go; waits petulantly a moment for him to return; then, forlorn and wretched, she bursts into the flood of tears which she intended to shed upon his breast. Under ordinary circumstances, those precious drops would not have been wasted. Young girls, when they quarrel with their lovers, are not extravagant with their tears; they put them carefully to the best possible use; and, I dare say, some of Lilian's tears would have fallen on a sheet of notepaper; and the stained lines of a letter would have reached Harold by the next post, begging him to come back, and to let her forgive him for all the spiteful things she had said to him. Unfortunately, however, just

at this critical juncture in the affairs of love—while Cupid was waiting, hat in hand, to accompany the letter to its destination and keep an eye on the postman—Lilian's father enters. He is on the verge of financial ruin, and he has just received a letter from Mr. John Strebelow, a man of great wealth, asking him for his daughter's hand in marriage. Mr. Westbrook urges her to accept him, not from any selfish motives, but because he dreads to leave, in his old age, a helpless girl, trained only to luxury and extravagance, to a merciless world. Lilian, on her part, shudders at the thought of her father renewing the struggle of life when years have exhausted his strength. She knows that she will be the greatest burden that will fall upon him; she remembers her dead mother's love for them both; and she sacrifices her own heart. Mr. Strebelow is a man of about forty years, of unquestioned honor, of noble personal character in every way. Lilian had loved him, indeed, when she was a little child, and she feels that she can at least respect and reverence him as her husband. Mr. Strebelow marries her without knowing

that she does not love him; much less, that she loves another.

Act second—Paris. Lilian has been married five years, and is residing with her husband in the French capital. As the curtain rises, Lilian is teaching her little child, Natalie, her alphabet. All the warm affection of a woman's nature, suppressed and thrown back upon her own heart, has concentrated itself upon this child. Lilian has been a good wife, and she does reverence her husband as she expected to do. He is a kind, generous and noble man. But she does not love him as a wife. Mr. Strebelow now enters, and, after a little domestic scene, the French nurse is instructed to dress the child for a walk with its mother. Strebelow then tells Lilian that he has just met an old friend of hers and of himself—the American artist, Mr. Harold Routledge, passing thru Paris on his way from his studio in Rome. He has insisted on a visit from Mr. Routledge, and the two parted lovers are brought face to face by the husband. They are afterwards left alone together. Routledge has lived a solitary life, nursing his feelings toward a woman who had heartlessly cast him off, as he thinks, to marry a

man merely for his wealth. He is bitter and cruel. But the cruelty to a woman which is born of love for her has a wonderful, an almost irresistible fascination for the female heart. Under the spell of this fascination, Lilian's old love reasserts its authority against that of his will. She forgets everything except the moment when her lover last parted from her. She is again the wayward girl that waited for his return; he has returned!—and she does what she would have done five years before; she turns, passionately, to throw herself into his arms. At this moment, her little child, Natalie, runs in. Lilian is a mother again, and a wife. She falls to her knees and embraces her child at the very feet of her former lover. Harold Routledge bows his head reverently, and leaves them together.

Act third. The art of breaking the tenth commandment—thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife—has reached its highest perfection in France. One of the most important laws of dramatic construction might be formulated in this way. If you want a particular thing done, choose a character to do it that an audience will naturally expect to

do it. I wanted a man to fall in love with my heroine after she was a married woman, and I chose a French count for that purpose. I knew that an American audience would not only expect him to fall in love with another man's wife, but it would be very much surprised if he didn't. This saved much explanation and unnecessary dialog. Harold Routledge overhears the Count de Carojac, a hardened roué and a duellist, speaking of Lilian in such terms as no honorable man should speak of a modest woman. Routledge, with a studio in Rome, and having been educated at a German university, is familiar with the use of the rapier. A duel is arranged. Lilian hears of it thru a female friend, and Strebelow, also, thru the American second of Mr. Routledge. The parties meet at the Château Chateaubriand, in the suburbs of Paris, at midnight, by the light of the moon, in winter. A scream from Lilian, as she reaches the scene in breathless haste, throws Routledge off his guard; he is wounded and falls. Strebelow, too, has come on the field, not knowing the cause of the quarrel; but anxious to prevent a meeting between two of his own personal friends.

Lilian is ignorant of her husband's presence, and she sees only the bleeding form of the man she loves lying upon the snow. She falls at his side, and words of burning passion, checked a few hours before by the innocent presence of her child, spring to her lips. The last of these words are as follows: "I have loved you—and you only—Harold, from the first."

These words, clear, unmistakable, carrying their terrible truth straight to his heart, come to John Strebelow as the very first intimation that his wife did not love him when she married him. Crushed by this sudden blow, an expression of agony on his face, he stands for a moment speechless. When his voice returns, he has become another man. He is hard and cold, still generous, so far as those things a generous man cares least for are concerned. He will share all his wealth with her; but, in the awful bitterness of a great heart, at that moment, he feels that the woman who has deceived him so wickedly has no natural right to be the guardian of their child. "Return to our home, madam; it will be yours, not mine, hereafter; but our child will not be there." Ungenerous words! But

if we are looking in our own hearts, where we must find nearly all the laws of dramatic construction, how many of us would be more generous, with such words as John Strebelow had just heard ringing in our ears? As the act closes, the startled love of a mother has again and finally asserted itself in Lilian's heart, its one overmastering passion of her nature. With the man she has loved lying near her, wounded, and, for aught she knows, dying, she is thinking only of her lost child. Maternal love, thruout the history of the world, has had triumphs over all the other passions; triumphs over destitution and trials and tortures; over all the temptations incident to life; triumphs to which no other impulse of the human heart—not even the love of man for woman—has ever risen. One of the most brilliant men I had ever known once said in court: "Woman, alone, shares with the Creator the privilege of communing with an unborn human being"; and, with this privilege, the Creator seems to have shared with woman a part of His own great love. All other love in our race is merely human. The play, from this time on, becomes the story of a mother's love.

Acts fourth and fifth. Two years later Lilian is at the home of her father in New York. Her husband has disappeared. His name was on the passenger list of a wrecked steamer; and no other word of him or of the child has been heard. If he had left the little girl in the care of others, it is unknown to whom or where. So Lilian is a widow and childless. She is fading, day by day, and is hardly expected to live. Her mind, tortured by the suspense, which, worse than certainty, is gradually yielding to hallucinations which keep her little one ever present to her fancy. Harold Routledge was wounded seriously in the duel, but not killed; he is near Lilian; seeing her every day; but he is her friend, rather than her lover, now; she talks with him of her child, and he feels how utterly hopeless his own passion is in the presence of an all-absorbing mother's love. It is discovered that the child is living peacefully among kind guardians in a French convent; and Routledge determines to cross the ocean with the necessary evidence and bring the little one back to its mother. He breaks the news to Lilian tenderly and gently. A gleam of joy illuminates her face for the first

time since the terrible night, two years before, and Routledge feels that the only barrier to his own happiness has been removed. But the sudden return and reappearance of the husband falls like a stroke of fate upon both. As the curtain descends on the fourth act, Lilian lies fainting on the floor, with Natalie at her side, while the two men stand face to face above the unconscious woman whom they both love. Three lives ruined—because Lilian's father, having lost his wealth, in his old age, dared not, as he himself expressed it, leave a tenderly nurtured daughter to a merciless world. The world is merciless, perhaps, but it is not so utterly and hopelessly merciless to any man or woman as one's heart may be.

Lilian comes back to consciousness on her deathbed. Her child had returned to her only as a messenger from heaven, summoning her home. But the message had been whispered in unconscious ears; for she had not seen the little girl, who was removed before the mother had recovered from her swoon. They dare not tell her now that Natalie is on this side of the ocean and asleep in the next room. Mr. Strebelow had heard

in a distant land, travelling to distract his mind from the great sorrow of his own life, of Lilian's condition, and he hastened back to undo the wrong he felt that he had committed. She asks to see him; she kisses his hand with tenderness and gratitude, when he tells her that Natalie shall be her own hereafter; his manly tears are tears of repentance, mingled with a now generous love. The stroke of death comes suddenly; they have only a moment's time to arouse the little one from its sleep; but they are not too late, and Lilian dies at last, a smile of perfect happiness on her face, with her child in her arms.

The Mississippi ducky, in Mark Twain's story, being told that his heroic death on the field of battle would have made but little difference to the nation at large, remarked, with deep philosophy; "It would have made a great deal of difference to me, sah." The radical change made in the story I have just related to you, before the production of the play in New York, was this: Lilian lives, instead of dying, in the last act. It would have made very little difference to the American nation what she did; but it made a great deal of difference to her, as you will

see, and to the play also in nearly every part. My reasons for making the change were based upon one of the most important principles of the dramatic art, namely: A dramatist should deal, so far as possible, with subjects of universal interest, instead of with such as appeal strongly to a part of the public only. I do not mean that he may not appeal to certain classes of people, and depend upon those classes for success; but, just so far as he does this, he limits the possibilities of that success. I have said that the love of offspring in woman has shown itself the strongest of all human passions; and it is the most nearly allied to the boundless love of Deity. But the one absolutely universal passion of the race—which underlies all other passions—on which, indeed, the very existence of the race depends—the very fountain of maternal love itself, is the love of the sexes. The dramatist must remember that his work cannot, like that of the novelist or the poet, pick out the hearts, here and there, that happen to be in sympathy with its subject. He appeals to a thousand hearts at the same moment; he has no choice in the matter; he must do this. And it is only when he deals with the

love of the sexes that his work is most interesting to that aggregation of human hearts we call the audience. This very play was successful in Chicago; but, as soon as that part of the public had been exhausted which could weep with pleasure, if I may use the expression, over the tenderness of a mother's love, its success would have been at an end. Furthermore—and here comes in another law of dramatic construction—a play must be, in one way or another, “satisfactory” to the audience. This word has a meaning which varies in different countries, and even in different parts of the same country; but, whatever audience you are writing for, your work must be “satisfactory” to it. In England and America, the death of a pure woman on the stage is not “satisfactory,” except when the play rises to the dignity of tragedy. The death, in an ordinary play, of a woman who is not pure, as in the case of ‘Frou-Frou,’ is perfectly satisfactory, for the reason that it is inevitable. Human nature always bows gracefully to the inevitable. The only griefs in our own lives to which we could never reconcile ourselves are those which might have been averted. The wife

who has once taken the step from purity to impurity can never reinstate herself in the world of art on this side of the grave; and so an audience looks with complacent tears on the death of an erring woman. But Lilian had not taken the one fatal step which would have reconciled an audience to her death. She was still pure, and every one left the theatre wishing she had lived. I yielded, therefore, to the sound logic, based on sound dramatic principle, of my New York manager, Mr. A. M. Palmer, and the piece was altered.

I have called the play, as produced in New York and afterward in London, the "same play" as the one produced in Chicago. That one doubt, which age does not conquer—which comes down to us from the remotest antiquity of our own youth, which will still exist in our minds as we listen to the music of the spheres, thru countless ages, when all other doubts are at rest; that never-to-be answered doubt: Whether it was the same jack-knife, or another one, after all its blades and handle had been changed—must ever linger in my own mind as to the identity of this play. But a dramatic author stops

worrying himself about doubts of this kind very early in his career. The play which finally takes its place on the stage usually bears very little resemblance to the play which first suggested itself to his mind. In some cases the public has abundant reason to congratulate itself on this fact, and especially on the way plays are often built up, so to speak, by the authors, with advice and assistance from other intelligent people interested in their success. The most magnificent figure in the English drama of this century was a mere faint outline, merely a fatherly old man, until the suggestive mind of Macready stimulated the genius of Bulwer Lytton, and the great author, eagerly acknowledging the assistance rendered him, made Cardinal Richelieu the colossal central figure of a play that was written as a pretty love-story. Bulwer Lytton had an eye single, as every dramatist ought to have—as every successful dramatist must have—to the final artistic result; he kept before him the one object of making the play of ‘Richelieu’ as good a play as he possibly could make it. The first duty of a dramatist is to put upon the stage the very best work he can, in the

light of whatever advice and assistance may come to him. Fair acknowledgment afterward is a matter of mere ordinary personal honesty. It is not a question of dramatic art.

So Lilian is to live, and not die, in the last act. The first question for us to decide—I say “us”—the New York manager, the literary attaché of the theatre, and myself—the first practical question before us was: As Lilian is to live, which of the two men who love her is to die? There are axioms among the laws of dramatic construction, as in mathematics. One of them is this—three hearts cannot beat as one. The world is not large enough, from an artistic point of view, for three good human hearts to continue to exist, if two of them love the third. If one of the two hearts is a bad one, art assigns it to the hell on earth of disappointed love; but if it is good and tender and gentle, art is merciful to it, and puts it out of its misery by death. Routledge was wounded in a duel. Strebelow was supposed to be lost in the wreck of a steamer. It was easy enough to kill either of them, but which? We argued this question for three weeks. Mere ro-

mance was on the side of the young artist. But to have had him live would have robbed the play of all its meaning. Its moral, in the original form, is this: It is a dangerous thing to marry, for any reason, without the safeguard of love, even when the person one marries is worthy of one's love in every possible way. If we had decided in favor of Routledge, the play would have had no moral at all, or rather a very bad one. If a girl marries the wrong man, she need only wait for him to die; and if her lover waits, too, it'll be all right. If, on the other hand, we so reconstruct the whole play that the husband and wife may at last come together with true affection, we shall have the moral: Even if a young girl makes the worst of all mistakes, and accepts the hand of one man when her heart belongs to another, fidelity to the duty of a wife on her side, and a manly, generous confidence on the part of her husband, may, in the end, correct even such a mistake. The dignity of this moral saved John Strebelow's life, and Harold Routledge was killed in the duel with the Count de Carojac.

All that was needed to affect this first change in the play was to instruct the actor

who played Routledge to lie still when the curtain fell at the end of the third act, and to go home afterward. But there are a number of problems under the laws of dramatic construction which we must solve before the play can now be made to reach the hearts of an audience as it did before. Let us see what they are.

The love of Lilian for Harold Routledge cannot now be the one grand passion of her life. It must be the love of a young girl, however sincere and intense, which yields, afterward, to the stronger and deeper love of a woman for her husband. The next great change, therefore, which the laws of dramatic construction forced upon us was this: Lilian must now control her own passion, and when she meets her lover in the second act she must not depend for her moral safety on the awakening of a mother's love by the appearance of her child. Her love for Harold is no longer such an all-controlling force as will justify a woman—justify her dramatically, I mean—yielding to it. For her to depend on an outside influence would be to show a weakness of character that would make her uninteresting. Instead, therefore,

of receiving her former lover with dangerous pent-up fires, Lilian now feels pity for him. She hardly yet knows her own feelings toward her husband; but his manhood and kindness are gradually forcing their way to her heart. Routledge, in his own passion, forgets himself, and she now repels him. She even threatens to strike the bell, when the Count de Carojac appears, and warns his rival to desist. This is now the end of the second act, a very different end, you see, from the other version, where the little girl runs in, and, in her innocence, saves the mother from herself.

Here let me tell a curious experience, which illustrates how stubbornly persistent the dramatic laws are, in having their own way. We were all three of us—manager, literary attaché, and author—so pleased with the original ending of the second act the picture of the little girl in her mother's arms, and the lover bowing his head in its presence of innocence, that we retained it. The little girl ran on the stage at every rehearsal at the usual place. But no one knew what to do with her. The actress who played the part of Lilian caught her in her arms, in

various attitudes; but none of them seemed right. The actor who played Routledge tried to drop his head, according to instructions, but he looked uncomfortable, not reverential. The next day we had the little girl run on from another entrance. She stopped in the center of the stage. Lilian stared at her a moment and then exclaimed: "Mr. Howard, what shall I do with this child?" Routledge, who had put his hands in his pocket, called out: "What's the girl doing here, anyway, Howard?" I could only answer: "She used to be all right; I don't know what's the matter with her now." And I remember seeing an anxious look on the face of the child's mother, standing at the side of the stage. She feared there was something wrong about her own little darling who played the part of Natalie. I reassured her on this point; for the fact that I was in error was forcing itself on my mind, in spite of my desire to retain the scene. You will hardly believe that I am speaking literally, when I tell you that it was not until the 19th rehearsal that we yielded to the inevitable, and decided not to have the child come on at all at that point. The truth was this: now that

Lilian saved herself in her own strength, the child had no dramatic function to fulfill. So strongly did we all feel the force of a dramatic law which we could not, and would not, see. Our own natural human instinct—the instinct which the humblest member of an audience feels, without knowing anything of dramatic law—got the better of three men, trained in dramatic work, only by sheer force, and against our own determined opposition. We were three of Stephenson's cows—or shall I say three calves?—standing on the track, and we could not succeed where Jumbo failed.

The third step, in the changes forced upon us by the laws of dramatic construction, was a very great one; and it was made necessary by the fact, just mentioned, that the child, Natalie, had no dramatic function to fulfil in the protection of her mother's virtue. In other words, there is no point in the play, now, where sexual love is, or can be, replaced by maternal love, as the controlling passion of the play. Consequently, the last two acts in their entirety, so far as the serious parts are concerned, disappear; one new scene and a new act taking their place. The sad mother,

playing with a little shoe or toy, passes out of our view. The dying woman, kissing the hand of the man she has wronged; the husband, awe-stricken in the presence of a mother's child; the child clasped in Lilian's arms; her last look on earth, a smile, and her last breath, the final expression of maternal tenderness—these scenes belong only to the original version of the play, as it lies in its author's desk. With an author's sensitive interest in his own work, I wasted many hours in trying to save these scenes. But I was working directly against the laws of dramatic truth, and I gave up the impossible task.

The fourth great change—forced on us, as the others were—concerns the character of John Strebelow. As he is now to become the object of a wife's mature affection, he must not merely be a noble and generous man; he must do something worthy of the love which is to be bestowed on him. He must command a woman's love. When, therefore, he hears his wife, kneeling over her wounded lover, use words which tell him of their former relations, he does not what most of us would do, but what an occasional hero

among us would do. Of course, the words of Lilian cannot be such, now, as to close the gates to all hopes of love, as they were before. She still utters a wild cry, but her words merely show the awakened tenderness and pity of a woman for a man she had once loved. They are uttered, however, in the presence of others, and they compromise her husband's honor. At that moment he takes her gently in his arms, and becomes her protector, warning the French roué and duellist that he will call him to account for the insults which the arm of the dead man had failed to avenge. He afterward does this, killing the count—not in the action of the play; this is only told. John Strebelow thus becomes the hero of the play, and it is only necessary to follow the workings of Lilian's heart and his a little further, until they come together at last, loving each other truly, the early love of the wife for another man being only a sad memory in her mind. There is a tender scene of explanation and a parting, until Lilian's heart shall recall her husband. This scene, in my opinion, is one of the most beautiful scenes ever written for the stage. At the risk of breaking the tenth commandment

myself, I do not hesitate to say, I wish I had written it. As I did not, however, I can express the hope that the name of Mr. A. R. Cazauran, who did write it, will never be forgotten in connection with this play as long as the play itself may be remembered. I wrote the scene myself first; but when he wrote it according to his own ideas, it was so much more beautiful than my own that I would have broken a law of dramatic art if I had not accepted it. I should not have been giving the public the best play I could, under the circumstances. Imbued, as my own mind was, with all the original motives of the piece, it would have been impossible for me to have made changes within a few weeks without the assistance Mr. Cazauran could give me; this assistance was invaluable to me in all parts of the revised piece. In the fifth act the husband and wife come together again, the little child acting as the immediate cause of their reconciliation; the real cause lies in their own true hearts.

Before we leave the subject, another change which I was obliged to make will interest you, because it shows very curiously what queer turns these laws of dramatic con-

struction may take. As soon as it was decided to have Lilian live, in the fifth act, and love John Strebelow, I was compelled to cut out the quarrel-scene between Lilian and Harold Routledge in the first act. This is a little practical matter, very much like taking out a certain wheel at one end of a machine because you have decided to get a different mechanical result at the other end. I was very fond of this quarrel-scene, but I lost no time in trying to save it, for I saw at once that Harold Routledge must not appear in the first act at all. He could only be talked about as Lilian's lover. John Strebelow must be present alone in the eyes and sympathy of the audience. If Routledge did not appear until the second act, the audience would regard him as an interloper; it would rather resent his presence than otherwise, and would be easily reconciled to his death in the next act. It was taking an unfair advantage of a young lover; but there was no help for it. Even if Harold had appeared in the first act, the quarrel-scene would have been impossible. He might have made love to Lilian, perhaps, or even kissed her, and the audience would have forgiven me reluctantly for having her

love another man afterward. But if the two young people had a lover's quarrel in the presence of the audience, no power on earth could have convinced any man or woman in the house that they were not intended for each other by the eternal decrees of divine Providence.

I have now given you the revised story of this play as it was produced at the Union Square Theater in New York, under the name of the 'Banker's Daughter.' I have said nothing about the comic scenes or characters, because the various changes did not affect them in any way that concerns the principles of dramatic art. They are almost identically the same in both versions. Now, if you please, we will cross the ocean. I have had many long discussions with English managers on the practice in London of adapting foreign plays, not merely to the English stage, but to English life, with English characters. The Frenchmen of a French play become, as a rule, Englishmen; so do Italians and Spaniards and Swedes. They usually, however, continue to express foreign ideas and to act like foreigners. In speaking of

such a transplanted character, I may be permitted to trifle with a sacred text:

The manager has said it,
But it's hardly to his credit,
That he is an Englishman!
For he ought to have been a Roosian,
A French, or Turk, or Proosian,
Or perhaps I-tali-an!
But in spite of Art's temptations,
To belong to other nations,
He becomes an Englishman!

Luckily, the American characters of the 'Banker's Daughter', with one exception, could be twisted into very fair Englishmen, with only a faint suspicion of our Yankee accent. Mr. James Alberry, one of the most brilliant men in England, author of the 'Two Roses,' was engaged to make them as nearly English as he could. The friendship, cemented as Alberry and I were discussing for some weeks the international social questions involved, is among the dearest and tenderest friendships I have ever made; and I learned more about the various minor differences of social life in England and American while we were thus at work together than I could have learned in a residence there of five

years. I have time to give you only a few of the points. Take the engagement of Lilian, broken in act first. An engagement in England is necessarily a family matter, and it could neither be made or broken by the mere fiat of a young girl, without consultation with others, leaving the way open for the immediate acceptance of another man's hand. In the English version, therefore, there is no engagement with Harold Routledge. It is only an understanding between them that they love each other. Not even the most rigid customs of Europe can prevent such an understanding between two young people, if they can once look into each other's eyes. They could fall in love through a pair of telescopes. Then the duel—it is next to impossible to persuade an English audience that a duel is justifiable or natural with an Englishman as one of the principles. So we played a rather sharp artistic trick on our English audience. In the American version, I assume that, if a plucky young American in France insults a Frenchman purposely, he will abide by the local customs, and give him satisfaction, if called upon to do so. So would a young Englishman, between you and

me; but the laws of dramatic construction deal with the sympathies of the audience as well as with the natural motives and actions of the characters in a play; and an English audience would think the French count ought to be perfectly satisfied if Routledge knocked him down. How did we get over the difficulty? First, we made Routledge a British officer returning from India, instead of an artist on his way from Rome—a fighting man by profession; and then we made the Count de Carojac pile so many sneers and insults on this British officer, and on the whole British nation, that I verily believe a London audience would have mobbed him if he hadn't tried to kill him. The English public walked straight into the trap, although they abhor nothing on earth more than the duelling system. I said that the comic characters were not affected by the changes made in America; the change of nationality did affect them to a certain extent. A young girl, Florence St. Vincent, afterward Mrs. Browne, represents, here, with dramatic exaggeration, of course, a type of young girl more or less familiar to all of us. In England she is not a type, but an eccentric personality, with which the

audience must be made acquainted by easy stages. It was necessary, therefore, to introduce a number of preliminary speeches for her, before she came to the lines of the original version. After that, she ran on without any further change, except a few excisions. Mrs. Browne is married to a very old man, who afterward dies, and in the last act she illustrates the various grades of affliction endured by every young widow, from the darkness of despair to the becoming twilight of sentimental sadness. This was delicate ground in England. They have not that utter horror of marriage between a very old man and a very young woman which, in this country, justifies all the satire which a dramatist can heap upon the man who commits this crime, even after he is in the grave. And the English people do not share with us—I say it to their credit—our universal irreverence for what is solemn and sacred. One must not, either in social life or on the stage, speak too lightly there of any serious subject; of course, they can laugh, however, at an old man that makes a fool of himself. So we merely toned down the levity by leaving old Mr. Browne out of the cast entirely. There

is a great difference, as in the case of *Routledge* left out of the first act, between what the audience sees and what it only hears talked about; and none of the laws of dramatic construction are more important than those which concern the questions whether you shall appeal to the ear of an audience, to its eye, or both. Old Mr. Browne was only talked about then, and as long as the English audience did not know him personally, it was perfectly willing to laugh at him after Mrs. Browne was a widow. Another change made for the London version will interest American business men. In our own version, Lilian's father and his partner close up their affairs in the last act and retire from their business as private bankers. "That will never do in England," said Mr. Alberry. "An old established business like that might be worth £100,000. We must sell it to some one, not close it." So we sold it to Mr. George Washington Phipps. This last character illustrates, again, the stubbornness of dramatic law. Mr. Alberry and I tried to make him an Irishman, or a Scotchman, or some kind of an Englishman. But we could not. He remains an American in England

in 1886, as he was in Chicago in 1873. He declined to change either his citizenship or his name; "G. Washington—Father of his Country—Phipps."

The peculiar history of the play is my only justification for giving you all these details of its otherwise unimportant career. I only trust that I have shown you how very practical the laws of dramatic construction are in the way they influence a dramatist. The art of obeying them is merely the art of using your common sense in the study of your own and other people's emotions. All I now add is, if you want to write a play, be honest and sincere in using your common sense. A prominent lawyer once assured me that there was only one man he trembled before in the presence of a jury—not the learned man, nor the eloquent man; it was the sincere man. The public will be your jury. That public often condescends to be trifled with by mere tricksters, but, believe me, it is only a condescension and very contemptuous. In the long run, the public will judge you, and respect you, according to your artistic sincerity.

NOTES

NOTES

THIS lecture was originally delivered in March, 1886, in the Sanders Theater, before the Shakspeare Society of Harvard University; and it was repeated before the Nineteenth Century Club in New York in December, 1889. On the latter occasion two other dramatic authors were requested to debate the points made by the speaker; and as a result he added a few supplementary remarks:

The Nineteenth Century Club looks for a discussion, I believe, on the subject brought forward in the paper of this evening. If the word "discussion" implies "argument," I fear there is nothing in the mere struggles of a dramatist in his workshop to justify that difference of opinion which is necessary to an argument. My American colleague, Mr. Brander Matthews, must feel like a man whose wife persists from day to day in saying nothing that he can object to, thereby making his home a desert and driving him to the club. As for the great Irish dramatist, this paper leaves him still wishing that some one would tread on the tail of his coat. But, with all true Irishmen, the second party in a quarrel is merely a convenience, not a necessity. Whenever Mr. Boucicault feels that a public discussion is desirable for any reason, he can always tread on the tail of his own coat, and make quite as good a fight of it all by himself as if some one was assisting him.

And he ended with this reference to the constructive skill of Ibsen :

Another thing strikes me in connection with this subject: the praise of Ibsen, the Scandinavian dramatist, is abroad in England; and again, as so often before, mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord in the direction of Boston. But some of the loudest worshippers of this truly great man in both countries either wilfully ignore, or else they know nothing about, his real greatness.

Ibsen holds in his hand the terrible power, in dealing with the evils of society, which dramatic construction gives to a genius like his; he has not laid this power aside and reduced his own stage to a mere lecture platform. A man armed with a sword who should lay it down in the heat of battle and take up a wisp of straw to fight with, would be a fool. Ibsen, like his great predecessors and contemporaries in France, deals his vigorous blows at social wrongs thru dramatic effects and the true dramatic relations of his characters. I know of no writer for the stage, past or present, who depends for his moral power more continuously at all points on the art of dramatic construction than Ibsen does. He, himself, would be the first to smile at those who praise him as if he were a writer of moral dialogs or the self-appointed lecturer for one of those psychological panoramas which are unrolled in acts, at a theater, or in monthly parts in a periodical.

In conclusion: to all who argue that careful construction is unnecessary in literary art, I will say only this: it is extremely easy not to construct.

It may be noted also that Bronson Howard returned to the topic of his lecture in a

contribution to the *Dramatic Mirror* in 1900; he called this

A M E R E S U G G E S T I O N .

So much is written in critical notices of plays, about their "construction," that I should like to suggest a few of the considerations which that term involves. It is possible that some of the beginners, who are to become the future dramatists of America, will see the necessity of thinking twice before using the term at all. Some of the more general considerations to be kept in view, when a careful and properly educated critic feels justified in using the word "construction," may be jotted down as follows:

I. The actual strength of the main incident of a play.

II. Relative strength of the main incident, in reference to the importance of the subject; and also to the length of the play.

III. Adequacy of the story in relation to the importance and dignity of the main incident and of the subject.

IV. Adequacy of the original motives on which the rest of the play depends.

V. Logical sequence of events by which the main incident is reached.

VI. Logical results of the story after the main incident is passed.

VII. The choice of the characters by which the sequence of events is developed.

VIII. Logical, otherwise natural, use of motives in these particular characters, in leading from one incident to another.

IX. The use of such human emotions and passions as are universally recognized as true, without

those special explanations which belong to general fiction and not to the stage.

X. The relation of the story and incidents to the sympathies of the audience as a collection of human beings.

XI. The relation of the story and incidents to the sympathies of the particular audience for which the play is written; to its knowledge and ignorance; its views of life; its social customs; and to its political institutions, so far as they may modify its social views, as in the case of a democracy or an aristocracy.

Minor matters—such as the use of comic relief, the relation of dialog to action, the proper use of superfluous characters to prevent an appearance of artificiality in the treatment, and a thousand other details belonging to the constructive side of a play—must also be within the critic's view; but a list of them here would be too long for the space available. When the young critic has made a careful study of the standard English drama, with a special view to the proper considerations above indicated, his opinion on the "construction" of a play will be of more or less value to American dramatic literature.

There is, of course, no overt novelty in the theory advanced by Bronson Howard in his address. The same theory was held by Francisque Sarcey, who declared that all the principles of playmaking might be deduced from the fact that a piece is always intended for performance before an audience. And Marmontel, dramatist as well as dramatic theorist, asserted that the first rule the play-

wright must obey is "to move the spectators, and the second is to move them only in so far as they are willing to be moved. . . . This depends on the disposition and the manners of the people to whom appeal is made and on the degree of sensibility they bring to the theater. . . . This is therefore a point in which tragedy is not invariable."

The same principle underlies George Meredith's statement in regard to Comedy: "There are plain reasons why the comic poet is not a frequent apparition; and why the great comic poet remains without a fellow. A society of cultivated men and women is required wherein ideas are current and the perception quick, that he may be supplied with matter and an audience."

B. M.

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